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Architecture Industry-Specific Services Means the Nuances Are Understood

By Joseph J. Minuta



Examples of how the façade of the building can be customized to reflect the owner's vision (for illustrative purposes only).

Architectural services simplify the process of building a new facility, expanding an existing facility, or updating a facility's image. For car washes and fast lubes, having industry-specific architectural services means they understand the subtle nuances of your operation. When choosing to work with an architectural-services provider,

selecting resources that understand your industry means they incorporate the entire conceptual design spectrum in order to save operators significant time, money, and hassle.

Building a new facility has many hurdles. The car wash and/or fast lube concepts are often scrutinized by local zoning regulators and the community. Historically, these facilities have not been especially pleasing to the senses - planned more with a means-to-an-end approach. Many appear as if they were constructed using the least attractive materials with disregard for the aesthetics of the landscaping, building, or their integration into the community. The appearances of many facilities are often not well-maintained, either through a lack of periodic maintenance and upkeep or the poor selection of initial building materials. Businesses that create prototype projects often do so with the intent of putting one in every community, seldom taking into consideration the impact their site will have on different locales. One size does not fit all nor does one design integrate into every community.

Fast lubes often incorporate the lowest common denominators to create a functional facility:

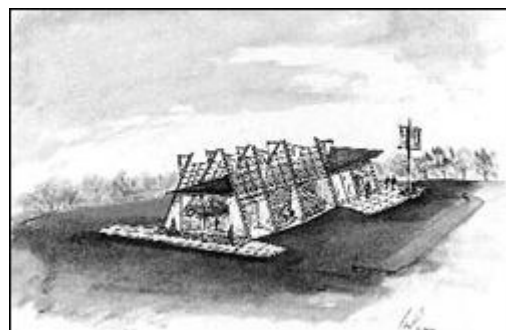
minimum required parcel size, building size, maneuverability. This type of linear thought systematically achieves goals, but what good does designing by minimums do when your competitor creates a warmly unique facility that customers flock to just because being there makes them feel good? Aesthetics is more about non-linear thought, the human condition, emotions, and attempting to answer the question, "What is beauty?" This is an abstract approach to reaching a goal - a skill many in business have difficulty comprehending. The best solution is to retain a professional who specializes in your particular business and is adept at these types of aesthetic skills and thought processes.

Decades of grungy archetypal imagery have been engrained into our minds. As a solution to a problem, communities have established strict zoning laws. Zoning is meant to protect, enhance, and preserve communities. They have also become the watchdogs for those business owners who promise the most beautiful projects but fail to deliver. Placing a gray, rectangular concrete block building with a flat roof and little or no detail in a

Victorian, Georgian, or Colonial community does not usually bode well with local zoning boards. Some communities are so against a particular project that the strictest regulations are placed upon the applicant. On the other hand, the applicant may have no interest in the community aesthetics and just wants to open a business to earn a living. Design professionals attempt to bring these two mindsets together.

Aesthetics can be expensive: extra landscaping with vegetation recommended by the locale in type and quantity, lighting, sidewalks, color, and materials to be used on the building, windows, signage - the list can seem unending. The role of architectural services is to meet this challenge in balancing the cost and the value of the project. The owner is in a particular channel of business because that is what he or she excels at doing. It seems a daunting task to balance new needs with the time required to keep up or grow a business, while also coordinating the many other aspects of running the business. Trying to also delve into a field in which one has little or no knowledge can be very discouraging. Hiring an adept professional, who understands the physical aspects of your business, can be the answer to your needs. When a decision is made to develop, an architect should be hired to prevent one from getting in over one's head. This will mitigate errors early on in a project's development, reduce owner frustration, and guide one through to the project's completion.

Meeting regulations such as recycling car wash water, environmental requirements for oil storage, and using materials that will endure the harsh interior treatment of these facilities to reduce lifecycle costs can eat up a large portion of the funds allocated for a project. Frequently, there are encumbered regulatory requirements and other entanglements that wear down the business owner, who then often disregards the necessity for aesthetics and is just happy to meet the regulations to be able to open for business.



An artist's impression of a car-care facility (for illustrative purposes only).

Architectural specialization is important because of the unique nature of this market. Most buildings are designed to provide shelter from the exterior environment, so we need only be concerned with keeping environmental elements such as snow and rain out. Fast lubes and car

washes are different in that the facility must also protect the structure from the interior environment. With car washes, for example, continuing applications of water in its mist and fluid form, compounded with freezing temperatures, do not facilitate the use of common building assemblies. The freeze and thaw process eats away at a building, causing building components to degrade internally and externally. In fast lube facilities, heat loss through opening and closing of bay doors is a constant issue. Non-slip surfaces, pit areas, environmental set-up, and ergonomics also rank as top installer design concerns. These and other sustainable nuances must be understood during the design process and accounted for in the execution of construction. Innovative ways of limiting these losses can be recommended by a specialized architect, thereby saving the owner money in the building's lifecycle costs that can often outweigh the initial cost of the building.

Most entrepreneurs do not go into business with the idea of creating an unattractive facility, but pie in the sky notions of aesthetics, even with the best of intentions, almost certainly do not meet the reality of regulations and codes. This often leaves the owner's initial vision crushed. Hiring an architect can help in mitigating unrealistic design concepts and keep the focus on what's important - avoiding the pitfalls and opening a respectable establishment, without compromising aesthetics for regulations.

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Joseph J. Minuta, AIA, is Chief Architect of B.A.S.E. Inc., a subsidiary of Castrol North America, Inc. The new B.A.S.E. (Building Architectural Services) program offers the automotive industry the first "in-house" architectural services program for existing and prospective clients. To find out more call 1-888-CASTROL.